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Title : A sex-specific affiliative contact behavior in Indian Ocean bottlenose dolphins, *Tursiops* sp.

Category : Behavior

Student :

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Abstract : Affiliative behaviors restricted largely to one sex are rare in mammals. Here we test the hypothesis that contact swimming, observed among bottlenose dolphins in Shark Bay, Western Australia, is predominately restricted to females. In contact swimming, the actor rests its pectoral fin against the flank of another dolphin, behind the other dolphin's pectoral fin and below or just posterior to the dorsal fin. The actor is positioned just above and alongside the other at a distance of $<1/3$ m. The terms actor and receiver apply only to the physical contact, with no assumptions regarding the flow of benefits. Contact swimming is a highly distinctive and visible behavior with no relative movement between the two dolphins; this lack of relative motion between the body of one individual and the pectoral fin of the other distinguishes contact swimming from other forms of pectoral fin contact behaviors. Using data from focal follows on males and females we demonstrate that contact swimming is almost exclusively a female-female affiliative behavior. We recorded all occurrences of contact swimming in the focal dolphin's group. Over 100 cases of contact swimming were recorded during >500 hours of male follows and >1400 hours following females. Female-female pairs accounted for the overwhelming number of contact swimming events. A log-odds ratio analysis indicates that females were disproportionately observed in contact swimming and the presence of males may influence this behavior. Based on the typical social context of contact swimming, we suggest that this behavior may function to signal cooperation and/or, as has been suggested for the famous case of 'G-G rubbing' in female bonobos (*Pan paniscus*), reduce stress.